Breathing a Little Easier with Cancer

When you have cancer, proper breathing can help you enjoy a better quality of life and be more active. However, people with cancer can experience breathing problems, like shortness of breath, for many reasons. If you have trouble breathing, it is important to talk with your doctor about the situation so he or she can determine why it is happening to you and how to best address the problem. You may find the following tips helpful:

- **Use controlled breathing techniques.** Take slow, even breaths by inhaling deeply through your nose for a count of two and exhaling for twice as long as you inhaled for a count of four.
- **Pace yourself.** Plan your day so you use your energy on the activities that are most important to you first.
- **Get comfortable.** Comfortable positioning may help make breathing easier. Do not lie flat on your back. Place a pillow under your knees when lying down.
- **Breathe clean, cool air.** Good ventilation, low humidity and an open window may help alleviate some of the symptoms of shortness of breath.
- **Stay active.** If your doctor permits, try some light exercises and gentle stretching. A physical therapist can help develop a safe exercise plan for you.
- **Eat well.** Try eating six small meals a day, rather than three large meals. Also, drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration. A dietician can help develop a meal plan that's right for you.
- **Quit smoking.** A professional counselor/smoking cessation professional is available by appointment at South Shore Hospital. Please call (781) 624-8904 if you would like more information.
- **Track your symptoms.** Shortness of breath may have a predictable pattern. If you notice a pattern, avoid or limit those activities whenever possible. Also, be aware of situations that make you anxious so you can learn to relax before you become short of breath.
- **Follow your doctor’s orders.** Stay in close communication with your doctor. Let your doctor know how your breathing problems are affecting you, including the impact on your daily routine.
- **See a rehabilitation therapist.** A therapist can teach you various techniques and therapies to help decrease shortness of breath.
- **Relax.** When you feel short of breath, it’s important to stay calm. Try relaxation techniques, guided imagery, stress management, meditation, massage, and yoga. If interested, please speak to your clinician about our programs offered at the Cancer Center.

**NOTE:** This information is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider.